

[THE MURDERS OF BUEL AND GIBBS, IN 1812; and of
5 MEMBERS OF THE BUTLER AND SNOW FAMILIES, IN 1813]

EARLY REMINISCENCES.

BY DAN PUTNAM.

The following account of incidents connected with the early settlement or occupation of Sandusky and other points adjacent, is from Mr. Dan Putnam, who now resides at LeGrand, Marshall Co., Iowa. He is a son of the woman that was taken by the Indians at the time of the murder of Mrs. Snow and others at the "Head of Cold Creek," (now Castalia):

In the Spring of 1811, my father and two other men, with their families, started from Sacketts Harbor, N. Y., in a boat of about ten or twelve tons burden, destined for the West. The boat was built expressly for the occasion. On reaching Niagara Falls the boat was hauled around the Falls, and we proceeded up Lake Erie on the Canada side, touching at various places, till we reached Point au Pelee. From that point we put directly across the Lake to Sandusky Bay and landed on the Peninsula where we remained a few days. There was then living there a man by the name of Wolcott, the same who was afterwards the first keeper of the light-house on the point. We next crossed the Bay to where Sandusky City now is, then called the "Ogontz Place." We found one man there whose name was Marsh. I stopped with him; the others of our company went on to Detroit, where my father sold the boat. At this time there was no building at the Ogontz Place, except the Ogontz hut. That was then occupied by a man by the name of Sly. A man by the name of Garrison was building a cabin; I helped him in raising it. He

had goods to trade with the Indians. Garrison continued there till the next March, when he removed his family to Fredericktown, Knox Co. A few days after Garrison left, who took his goods with him, three Indians came there from their encampment on the Portage, intending to murder Garrison and his family and plunder the store and house. Being disappointed in their prey, they went about three-quarters of a mile towards Pipe Creek to a house occupied by two men by the names of Gibbs and Buel. The Indians were well acquainted with Buel and Gibbs, and called as *friends* to stay over night; but the Indians murdered both of them before morning. It appeared to have been done in the fore part of the night. Buel had spread his blanket and laid down. Gibbs went out for a handful of wood, and while Gibbs was out the Indians killed Buel with an axe. The pole of the axe seemed to have been buried in his head, and one arm extended upon the floor, cut off, only connected by a little of the skin. It appears that Gibbs was met at the door, for there was found an armfull of wood having the appearance of falling from his arms. Across his face was the mark of a blow, apparently from the handle of the axe, for the axe head lay upon the floor stained with blood. Gibbs doubtless turned and ran, for he was found ten or twelve rods distant from the house, having a shot in his back. We cut the bullet out of his breast; it had penetrated his breast bone and lodged in the skin. The

body had other marks of violence. The Indians then plundered the house and attempted to burn it, but the floor being yet green the fire enkindled by them went out. The bodies lay several days before discovered. Three or four of us went from the Head of Cold Creek to bury them. In washing Gibbs we took a spear out of him; it was about three inches long and two inches broad at the butt end, running to a sharp point. There was a shank at the butt end with square shoulders; the shank was set in a club and fastened. The blade entered under the ear, and the shank broke and left the blade in. We knew to whom the spear belonged; his name was Semo, a half-breed. I knew him well; he told me that he killed a negro in Malden and put him under the ice. The name of the other Indian was John. The third was a boy, who, it was said, had nothing to do with the murder.* All the men in the vicinity armed themselves and pursued the Indians to Portage River and arrested John; Semo kept out of the way. The Indians, however, soon arrested Semo and delivered him up to the whites, admonishing them to be cautious lest he should escape from them. Notwithstanding the caution, he did escape. The Indians arrested him the second time; but he shot himself. It was well for the people in all that part of the country that he was put out of the way, for he would have been a hard Indian through the war that soon followed, if he had lived. John was taken to Cleveland and hanged. This murder took place on the night of the last day of March or first day of April, 1812.

After my father sold his boat at Detroit, he took to another boat, with his family, that was bound to the mouth of Huron River. From there they went to the Head of Cold Creek, where they stopped.

*No other account has connected this boy with these two Indians. Mr. Putnam has probably confounded the circumstances of this murder with the one committed by two Indians on the Peninsula, with whom was a boy who took no part in that murder.

On the 21 day of June, 1813, while all the men were away—my father and two brothers and Snow and his two boys, being at a distance of a mile and a half, planting corn on a farm that had been vacated, the women and children were at Snow's house—three Indians entered the house, took the women by the hair of their heads and led them out of doors. They asked them if they would march; my mother told them she would. By this time other Indians had come up. They collected the children together and started them on after their mothers. About this time three other Indians appeared with a young man by the name of Henry Grass, who was found at work a little way from the house. There were sixteen Indians in the company. Some of them plundered the house; the rest moved on with the prisoners. Snow had a mill on the creek, which stood near where Mack's was afterwards placed. They crossed the creek on the mill dam. On the bank of the creek they killed the two youngest children, (two little boys about two years old,) one belonging to Mrs. Snow and the other to Mrs. Butler. I think they scalped the children before they killed them; for they stuck the pipe end of their tomahawk through the skull, and when it was pulled out the skull turned up. It was not thicker than paper. A few rods further on, we found a little girl, about four years old, dead, stripped and scalped. It was the daughter of Mrs. Butler.

This scene transpired at about four o'clock in the afternoon. A young man by the name of Markham and myself were at work about one hundred rods from the house. We first discovered what had occurred at the house. Mr. Butler had gone to Huron. There was no settlement nearer than about five miles; and, by the time the alarm was given, night came on. By the next morning all the men in the neighborhood had assembled at the house. We took their

trail, found the bodies of the three children before mentioned, and a little further on found where they had apparently stopped and sat down and put moccasins upon their feet. They put moccasins upon Mrs. Snow, but, being near the time of giving birth to a child, she was unable to travel—and she was killed, stripped and scalped. While these several batcheries were committed, the other prisoners were marched on and did not witness the cruelties. When the Indian that acted as butcher came up with the company of prisoners, he approached my mother and took hold of her little boy, four or five years old, whom she sometimes led by the hand and sometimes carried, and told my mother to let him have the child. They had quite a tussle, which was observed by the chief Indian, who came up, pushed the Indian away and told my mother to let him take the child and he would carry him. He took the boy, placed him on top of the load of plunder he had taken from the house, and carried him on to the mouth of Big Pickerel Creek, where they had left their canoes. The young man they had taken took a boy of Snow's upon the top of his load and carried him till they reached the canoes. They killed another little boy

about six years old, belonging to Butler. They would have taken him along, but he trying several times to escape from them, they finally killed him.

The number of persons taken by the Indians was thirteen; five were killed and eight carried off. The Snow family consisted of Mrs. Snow, Electa, Laura, Millard and Robert Snow, the last of whom was killed. The Butler family consisted of Mrs. Butler and her children, Smith, Julia and Charles, who were killed, and Henry Grass and Hannah Page, a girl that was living with them. The Putnam family consisted of Mrs. Putnam and Orlean Putnam, who now lives in Cass Co., Michigan.

Those murdered were buried on the hill near the head of the creek, where the burying ground was when I left there. The place was selected by Snow, Butler and my father.

Since I commenced this narrative, I have received a letter from Judge Fowler, of Margaretta, and I have sent the balance to him. Perhaps you can pick out some things that will be of some use to you. It is done in my rough, rude way; I had no one to assist me and could not well get any assistance.

[Additional notes about the Snow, Butler, and Putnam families:

Dorastus P. Snow, (from N.Y. State, and possibly originally from VT), had settled here in "Spring of 1810".

His murdered wife is said to have been Susannah (Hawley). Their murdered son Robert was about age 2. Charles Butler (Sr.), arrived here in "1811 or 1812" (apparently from Canada, because his murdered son

Charles, who was born in 1811, was thought to have been born in Canada).

Daniel Putnam, (the author of that memoir) was the son of Uzziel Putnam, formerly from VT.

That memoir (by Daniel Putnam) is referenced in the (reformatted 2024) publication, *(BLOCKHOUSES AND MILITIAMEN OF THE) "FIRE LANDS" IN THE WAR-OF-1812* which likewise is freely available at the Internet Archive.

{ This current publication is a preview of: *WAR-OF-1812 MILITIAMEN OF (OLD) 'HURON COUNTY'*, which will eventually contain all of the original source documents that are referenced in that publication. }

[Note: technically, in 1809, "Huron County" superseded the "Fire Lands"; and several significant local participants here, during the War-of-1812, were from an area outside of the (so-called) "Fire Lands".]